

The Sniper

The man in the expensive suit settled into a chair across from me. He had been very polite and offered me tea before the interrogation began.

Let's not be subtle here, that is exactly what this was.

"Tell me your story, Mr. Potter."

Sniper – 5 June 1998

It was an unusual spring day in Diagon Alley.

The sun was shining with only a few puffy clouds casually drifting across the sky. The spring air was unusually warm. It was the kind of day merchants loved. Witches and wizards of all types would emerge to enjoy shopping in the Alley. Even in those dark days of the Second Voldemort War, this day was a day that would draw shoppers into the stores.

Diagon Alley was very crowded this morning. Unfortunately, the crowds had nothing to do with shopping or the beautiful spring day.

Death Eaters stood openly along the Alley outside every shop. Many of the shops were open under the Death Eaters' watchful eyes. Shops owned by those openly supportive of Dumbledore and the former Ministry were closed, if they still stood at all. The former home of Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes stood empty, most of its inventory taken when Fred and George fled or looted sometime after they left.

Whilst most of the shoppers seemed nervous passing by the posted Death Eaters, a festive atmosphere flourished amongst a large minority of those passing below me. They called out to one another and often addressed the masked Death Eaters by name. Apparently they recognized the wearers by the customized designs on the silver masks.

The celebration, real or forced, came about due to Voldemort's successful coup against Minister Bones' Ministry the previous night. The Dark Lord struck during an emergency Wizengamot meeting.

Traitors within the Wizengamot had informed Voldemort that the Aurors had located his headquarters and were preparing a full assault by all Ministry and Order forces. The session was called to finalize plans and receive Wizengamot approval.

Voldemort launched a pre-emptive strike while the Light forces were waiting for orders. When the traitorous members of the Wizengamot started cursing the defenders in the back, organized resistance started to crumble. The Death Eaters sensed victory and pushed even harder whilst the defenders' moral dropped.

In the end it was an almost total victory. Dumbledore, Bones and a remnant of their forces were able to escape to Hogwarts, their last stronghold. Dawlish, Moody, and Sturgis Podmore led the rearguard that enabled their escape. According to the 'official' report in the morning's *Daily Prophet*, none of the defenders survived. The wounded and captives were AK'd as a warning to any others that still sought to stop the Dark Lord.

This morning was to be Voldemort's "Coming Out Party" as it were. Today would be the first time most of the wizards and witches below would see the Dark Lord in person. The *Prophet* informed the magical population that any family not in attendance would be eliminated as "traitors to the true and natural government of magical Britain".

Rumour was everyone not attending below was running to Hogwarts for Dumbledore's protection. Bloody useless the lot of them.

I watch as the Inner Circle members gather on the stage setup below. A Slytherin House banner flies on one side of the stage whilst a flag with the old Slytherin Family sigils stands on the other corner. I see my old friends Lucius and Draco Malfoy standing next to the LeStranges. Odd, I don't see Snape. Figured he would have joined the winning side no matter where his true loyalties lay. I noticed the youngest Malfoy was standing oddly but I dismissed it as unimportant.

Lucius moved to the podium and started to speak. I can't hear him too well from this distance, but I don't need to. I can guess the rubbish coming out of his mouth. I almost gave into my impulses for a moment, but I control them from long experience.

After two minutes of Malfoy's crap, he gestures to his side in a welcoming gesture. The crowd applauds and cheers enthusiastically. I hope that is simply out of a survival instinct and not to show real support. However I have had too much experience with the magical sheep of Britain and don't really have much hope.

Voldemort moves to the podium in his arrogant stride. Even from here I can see the front ranks of the crowd drawl back as they get their first clear sight of his white, snake-like face. Still hasn't grown a nose. You'd think a wizard of his power would have gotten around to at least try looking human.

I move away from my spotting scope that I had been watching the "festivities" from and moved to the Accuracy International AWM .338 Magnum sniper rifle sitting on the table beside me. In a calm, deliberate manner I move into position.

For a shot that had only been decided on early this morning, this operation was surprisingly well planned out. WWW sat perfectly in place to view the square where the Ministry held all of its ceremonies. I was counting on the wizarding world's love of tradition to ensure it was not moved. Fred and George's former apartment had a great view of the square and their kitchen table made a perfect firing platform. The AWM was rated at a range of over 1.1km. The seven hundred and fifty meters I would be firing should be simple enough. Finally, the festive flags lining the Alley and the two on the stage gave the wind conditions all the way to the target.

Snake-face was starting his speech as I lined up the crosshairs in my scope. I decided that his nostril slits made a great target. I made a few minor adjustments for wind and took a breath. I slowly exhaled and then held it. From training my pulse was slow and steady. I waited for the pause between beats and slowly gave the trigger a little extra pressure. The recoil against my shoulder is almost a surprise.

The .338 Magnum hollow-point bullet entered Voldemort's head just to the left of my target point. The soft lead of the bullet quickly mushroomed and took most of the back of the Dark Lord's head with it as it exited.

A detached, observer in me noted that Draco and his mother, Narcissa, were covered in Tommie-boy's brains. They both looked stunned. Heh, that's the only way the git would ever get some brains.

The trained, professional part of my brain calmly cycled the bolt and lined up for another shot. A moment later and Lucius is on his way to join his master. The last three rounds in the clip end the LeStrange line. I am sure Tonks will forgive me for removing her aunt from the world of the living. I am definite about Sirius. He just better not try to "thank" me as Padfoot.

I drop the empty clip out and insert another one as the dark wizards on the stage start to realize their attacker is not someone in their immediate area. Stupid purebloods. So convinced of their own superiority that they blinded themselves to Muggle achievements. They probably think we still use muzzleloaders.

The sheep are not concerned where the attacks are coming from. They are panicking and running in all directions to get out of the Alley. The detached portion of my brain hopes no one gets crushed in the panic.

The first shot from the new clip removed Walden Macnair from the mortal coil. Then I spotted a large rat scurry across the stage. I snapped off a quick shot. The bullet missed the rat's head but hit its lower half on the left side. The large sniper bullet demolished the rat's hindquarters. The next round finished off the rat. Sirius and Remus would be pleased.

I realized the Death Eaters were starting to fan out in search of the unseen attacker. Starting the second clip was probably a mistake. But it felt good.

I wandlessly summon all the spent brass littering the floor and shrink the rifle and spotting scope. I quickly pull a plain, black wizard robe over my muggle clothes and make my way silently down the stairs and out of the shop.

I join those fleeing the scene. I have my hood down and expression of pure panic on my face. I am not concerned that the Death Eaters will recognize me but because they can see my face they will not

regard me as a likely suspect. I pick up a little girl of around five who was standing crying against one of the buildings. Now I am simply a father trying to get his daughter out of a dangerous situation.

A minute later, I am passing through the Leaky Cauldron. I hand the child to Tom and tell him she lost her parents in the crowd. Tom tried to object but I am out the door and into Muggle London before he can get the words out.

I transfigured my robe into a light jacket and adjusted my features as I make my way towards to closest Tube station.

Thirty minutes later, the man known as Lance Corporal Cedric Diggory of 'A' Company 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment returned to his barracks. After cleaning my weapon and stowing the other gear, I dropped into my rack to think about everything that had happened today.

The man who killed my parents was dead along with a bunch of his followers. I wanted to feel happiness or excitement. I had fought for this moment for years. Why didn't I want to go out and celebrate that bastard's death?

I think part of me wanted to do just that. Go out and get pissed, cut loose. But a bigger part of me just wanted to check it off my To-Do list and move on.

My 'host' nodded as I finished describing eliminating Tom and company. "Very interesting, Mr. Potter. But tell me how you ended up in this position. You must admit, it is not a path one would expect the "Chosen One" of the British magical population to choose

I reluctantly nodded my agreement. But my thoughts started drifting back to how it started.

Court – 12 August 1995

I stood as the Wizengamot returned from deliberating my fate. Fudge rejected the testimony of a Squib, Mrs. Figg, saying that it was not proven that Squibs could see dementors. To make matters worse for me, Dumbeldore was still refusing to as much as glance in my

direction. Mr. Weasley tried to comfort me but his nervousness came through too loud to be much help.

“Mr. Potter,” Fudge started. “It is the decision of the Wizengamot that you are guilty of the charges against you. You will be expelled from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry effective immediately.” His pompous tones took on a tinge of smug victory. He smirked expectantly as he added, “Turn over your wand for destruction, immediately.”

I glanced at Dumbledore for some sign of hope. I didn't get it. The old man looked resigned.

“Give me your wand, Harry,” Dumbledore said with a sigh. “There is nothing we can do now.”

My hand trembled as I drew my wand out of my back pocket and handed it to the Headmaster. He never looked at me as he took my wand and handed it to a waiting Auror. I winced as the sound of the wand snapping echoed in the courtroom. I fought back the tears that tried to come out.

“I will remind you, Mr. Potter, possession of a wand will now bring you five years in Azkaban Prison.” I can merely nod in my shock. “Then I declare this court closed.”

The Wizengamot files out of the courtroom as I collapsed in shock at the news. Dumbledore walks quickly out of the room without a word.

“Come with me, Harry,” Mr Weasley says in a gentle tone. “Let's get you home.”

Grimmauld Place – 3 September 1995

The next three weeks were the worst of my life. And with my life, that is saying something. Mrs. Weasley cried and wailed about the news. Like I didn't feel bad enough already. The various members of the Order expressed their support but it didn't help. Dumbledore never even bothered to show his face.

Ron and Hermione tried but I just didn't want to see them. Especially after their Prefect badges arrived and Hermione started talking about revising for OWLS. The last thing I wanted to hear was the importance of a good grade in Transfiguration or Charms! I love the girl, but when it comes to school work, she has the same emotional depth she accuses Ron of having. I think they would make a perfect couple. Really, I do. Stop laughing.

I'll admit now that I did not handle things very well. I was so sour even Ginny's everlasting crush died in those three weeks. In my defence, I was a fifteen year old from an abusive situation that felt like he'd been rejected again. I know I was a prat about it but keep it in context.

Sirius was happy to have me living with him full-time but felt guilty about the circumstances. He kept talking about my parents and how they were in school. Did you know my mum had just finished her Healer training when we went into hiding? Sirius said the Death Eaters were more scared of her than my Auror father. She kept using Healing charms to do all kinds of nasty things to her opponents.

I stayed in my room all day on September 1st. Mr. and Mrs. Weasley returned to the Burrow after taking Ron, Hermione and Ginny to King's Cross Station. I didn't want to think about the students on the train to Hogwarts. I read some Muggle magazines and books to pass the time. I think even Hedwig tired of me I was so rotten.

It was September 3rd when Tonks stumbled into my room and forced me to start moving.

"Wotcher, Harry!" She paused in the doorway and made a face. "Uh, get your smelly arse out of that bed and go take a shower!"

"Go away, Tonks. I don't care."

"Okay, kid" she smiled while her hair started to cycle colours. "Dobby!"

Dobby appeared with a pop in the middle of my room. "Ms. Tonky called Dobby?"

The metamorph Auror smiled at the house-elf whilst I groaned at his appearance. "Yes, Dobby. Harry needs a shower and this room cleaned up. Can you dump him in the shower and then get this room cleaned and aired out. It's rank in here."

Dobby spun around till he saw me. "Oh, great wizard Harry Potter! Dobby is so happy to be seeing you again! Mr. Padfoot says Dobby can come here and work for Mr Harry Potter and his godfather! Let me's help you to the shower!"

Before I can protest the hyper little elf has me dumped fully dressed in the shower with hot water pouring down on me.

"Get undressed and wash yourself, Harry! Or I'll come in and help you!" Tonks called. Her threat was minimized by her falling over a discarded sock lying in the middle of my floor.

I resigned myself to taking a shower. I actually started to feel human again. Getting clean again felt good. I left the hot water wash over me for a good half hour before I got out of the shower.

I walked into my now much cleaner room whilst drying my hair with a towel. I was still annoyed with Tonks for demanding I take my shower. I scowled as I saw her sprawled out on my bed.

"Hey, cutie! That scowl really makes you look sexy. I should take a picture and send it off to Teen Witch Weekly!"

I growled in her general direction and did my best to ignore her. I should have realized Tonks won't let you ignore her. Maybe it is a Black thing. Sirius is the same way. If you ignore his pranks he just makes them worse the next time. Draco was descended from the Blacks too. Maybe if I had punched him in the mouth that first Express trip he would have moved on to another target?

A pillow hitting my head brought me back into the moment. I scowled and threw it back. Why wouldn't she leave me alone?

I saw the pillow returning and made an irritated gesture at it.

A moment later, Tonks was stunned as the pillow returned to her at a much higher speed. It struck her with enough force to smack her head into the wall behind my bed. She slumped to the ground unconscious as I watched in disbelief.

“Sirius!” I screamed. I jumped to my feet and ran over to the bed.

Sirius came running into the room with his wand drawn. “What’s wrong, Harry?”

“It’s Tonks. I hit her with a pillow and she got knocked out.”

He smirked as he looked at his cousin’s unconscious form. “Bloody hell, Harry. I’ll tell you that knocking a bird out is not really a good way to get her into bed.”

“Oh shut up.” I growl while fighting a smile. Sirius is like an overgrown child. Even now I have to think sometimes about who the older of the two of us is.

Sirius picked up Tonks and put her back onto the bed. “Wow, mate. You really did a job on her. How hard did you hit her?”

Before I could answer, Tonks groaned and said, “He didn’t. He wandlessly banished the pillow back at me.”

Sirius looked impressed. “Really wandless magic or just accidental?”

I shrugged. “Both I guess. I was thinking about what I would do if I had my wand but I was also angry.”

Sirius sank down on the bed with a thoughtful look. “Have you every deliberately done wandless magic?”

Well, Aunt Marge could hardly count as deliberate. “When the Dementors came I dropped my wand. I couldn’t find it so I called out Lumos. My wand tip lit like it would normal. That was how I found it.” It hurt to talk about my wand.

The Black cousins looked gobsmacked. “Why didn’t you tell us about this, Harry?” Sirius asked.

My anger welled up again. "I was a little more worried about the Dementors and going to court then a bloody Lumos spell!"

Sirius made a placating gesture. "Easy Harry. I understand. But not many of us can do anything wandless. This is something special. Your mum could do some summoning." The old Marauder grinned. "Once you climbed onto James's broom. It started to go and she summoned you right off the broom. You cried because you wanted the broom back." His face sobered after a moment. Mine did too when he added, "I am going to talk to Dumbledore about this."

"Like he would bloody care," I grumbled. Sirius ignored me.

"Come downstairs, Pronglet. Dobby made us lunch. I have to keep you fed or Molly said she is coming back to stay!" Sirius affected a horrified look. (Or maybe it wasn't pretend!)

I gave over my funk and followed the cousins down to the kitchen.

I never found out exactly what Sirius and Dumbledore talked about that night. The next morning Sirius started taking me through a series of exercises to develop wandless skills. It was frustrating and tiring. I felt like a First year again.

After three weeks of trying I was so frustrated I accidentally Apparated myself to my bedroom. I was so shocked I passed out from using too much magic.

When I woke up I laid in my bed in that in between place where you are not asleep but not really awake. In a moment of clarity, I realized I was trying too hard. My magic wanted to help me; I just needed to tell it what to do.

I started practicing in secret. I found I could do most of the first three years of spells from the Hogwarts curriculum but they needed a lot more energy without a wand. The Fourth and Fifth year spells exhausted me after two or three spells.

I kept the incident and my epiphany from Sirius. I don't really know why. Actually I do know. Even with the wandless magic, I would always be a burden in the case of a Death Eater attack. Fighting with

up to Third year spells might help delay the attack, but if the Death Eater was competent and started using NEWT or higher spells, I was finished. Sirius was so hopeful that the wandless magic would be enough. Also I didn't want the old man to know about my skill. I felt like he had turned my out to the wolves for telling the truth. I didn't feel like I owed him anything.

When we "practiced" I would deliberately fail. Sirius always kept up a cheerful face and claimed I could still do a lot more than most wizards. It hurt to keep that secret from him.

It was mid-October when Tonks made yet another accidental discovery. I was reading in the Black Library. The Blacks kept a historical record of their family achievements. I pretended it was like reading a book written by the Addams Family. It was too creepy to think it was real. Sirius was away for a couple days on a mission for the Order. So I had the house to myself.

"Wotcher, Harry! Whatcha reading?" she asked as she bounded into the room.

"The Addams Family records" I answered without looking up. Tonks grinned catching the reference.

"I just heard all the Weasleys and Hermione will be coming here for the hols. Isn't that good news?"

"Sure, Tonks. Great."

The pink-haired Auror dropped into the chair across from me. "Harry, you have to put this aside. Your friends miss you. Have you returned any of their letters?" By my silence Tonks knew the answer.

Tonks sank into the chair for a moment stymied for a moment. Then she again showed her relationship to Sirius by bouncing back again. "I know! How about a haircut?! I know changing my hair always perks me right up!" She demonstrated by changing the colour and length several times.

"It's no good, Tonks. My aunt tried to cut my hair once and it just grew back that night. It never changes."

Tonks sat up. "Are you serious?"

Padfoot would never forgive me for letting that go. "Nope, but if you want I can run down stairs and get him." I got a mock scowl for my effort.

Tonks got a serious look on her face. (Really, no pun.) "Harry, did I ever tell you how I found out I was a metamorphmagus?"

I looked up from my book, curious about the change of subject.

Tonks smiled at my curiosity. "I was a Third year and was the shortest girl in my year. A couple Slytherin girls in my year were teasing me for being so short. I got upset and ran to my dorm. I didn't come out all night.

"The next morning when I woke up I felt odd as I got out of bed. I fell over as I tried to walk to the bathroom. It wasn't until I looked in the mirror that I realized I was over two meters tall now. (Over 6.5 ft.) My roommates called for Professor McGonagall. She took me to the Hospital Wing. The teachers put it out that I drank a badly made prank potion. It took me weeks to learn to control my ability."

"Is that why you are so clumsy?" I asked. "What is your real height?"

Tonks turned a bit pink and muttered "151cm" (A little under 5ft) She sighed. "I lose the extra height if I am in a situation I need to move well but I *like* the extra height!"

With an effort, Tonks pulled herself back. "Harry, if you can control your hair, that may be a sign you could be a metamorphmagus too"

Yes, I am dense. I really didn't see that coming. "Do you really think so?"

"Sit back Harry and close your eyes. Conjure an image of yourself in your mind. Keep the image firm. Do you have it?"

"Yes" I whisper. It was a similar exercise to what I had done with Sirius when trying to develop my wandless skills. It is not any easy thing to do. Try it. Not just your face, but your whole body.

“Now make the image have hair down to his shoulders,” she instructed.

I was struggling to do that when she started clapping. I opened my eyes to find my hair down to my shoulders. Tonks was bouncing around the room in her excitement. “That was great! Let’s try some more!”

A metamorphmagus needs to be able to completely visualize how they want their body to change or they have to have maintained physical contact with the person they want to mimic for at least ten seconds while concentrating on their “aura”. So I could not do a girl. I had never even kissed one at that point let alone seen one naked. Can’t visualize something you’ve never really seen. I could do faces I was familiar with or generic changes to my body but that was the extent of it.

The only sticking point was the stupid scar. A normal scar was not a problem but because it was a bloody “curse scar” I couldn’t do a thing to it. I eventually discovered that since I couldn’t cover it up, I could move it. I put it on my bum. I figured that if anyone wanted to kiss up to the “Boy Who Lived” they would know exactly where to kiss. Very efficient, no? Sirius liked it when I told him later.

Sirius returned four days later. He immediately dragged himself into his room and slept for twelve hours. I waited until lunch the next day and I went into wake up my godfather.

I ran into the room. “Sirius! Wake up! We are going to miss the train!”

“Huh?”

I started shaking him. “Come on, get up! We can’t be late for Hogwarts again!” Sirius had told me about the time he and my father missed the train before their Sixth year because Dad wanted to buy roses in his effort to get Mum to go out with him. The plan backfired when she thought he Floo’d to the school because he was too cool to ride with the rest of the students.

“James?” Sirius asked in a groggy voice.

“Who else?” I asked as I leaned over him so he could see my brown eyes and scar free forehead.

His arms suddenly reached up to wrap me in a bear hug. “Oh James! It was all just a horrid dream! You’re still alive and Lily! Peter didn’t betray us. I was never in Azkaban! Oh James I am so happy!”

Now I was concerned. I could feel Sirius’s tears of joy on my shoulder as he hugged me. Sirius was not going to be happy when he realized this was just a prank. How could I tell him?

“The worst part was you had this little git son that thought he could pull one over on me, the Great Padfoot!”

The great prat! I fired a wandless Stinging Hex into his belly. He let me go to grab his stomach.

“Sirius, you had me scared! I thought you were going to freak on me. How did you know it was me?”

Sirius laughed at my expression. “My little cousin is more afraid of me than you. I am older and deeper in sin than you. Besides, James would never have woken me so nicely. Water balloons or stink pellets at least.”

“Really?” I asked. “Dobby!”

Dobby appeared for a moment over Sirius’s bed with a basket of water balloons. He hovered just long enough to dump the basket. Then he blinked away.

“Tonks suggested the balloons but I wanted to be nice,” I told my dripping godfather. “Dobby was my backup.”

25 November 1995

I had been locked in Grimmauld Place for over three and a half months with no prospects for going anywhere else anytime soon. I asked Sirius about going out but he told me Dumbledore had forbidden it as too dangerous.

Sirius was being sent out on Order missions on a regular basis now. Dumbledore was taking advantage of the animagus by having the dog scout known Death Eater houses for any sign Voldemort was in residence.

My godfather was out sniffing out a Dark Lord and it was too dangerous for me to go to the local pub for lunch! Throw in the fact that I could look like anyone and Voldemort didn't know that and it made even less sense. Sirius did his best to get me out of my funk, but he wasn't having any luck.

Things came to a head the afternoon of the 25th. The Order was holding a meeting downstairs during a Saturday afternoon. (That I was barred from naturally.) I caught Dumbledore on his way to the Floo after the meeting.

"How long are you going to force me to stay here?" I demanded.

"Poor little Potter forced to spend his time lazing around," Snape sneered.

"Sod off, Snivellus."

"That is *Professor* Snape, Harry."

I snorted. "I am not a student anymore, *Headmaster*. I am not under your rules anymore.

Dumbledore sighed. "I must insist Harry that you show Professor Snape the proper amount of respect. I know you are feeling confined here but you must remain for your own safety and that of others."

"I'll show him the same amount of respect he deserves. The same amount I show the paper when I go to the loo." Snape looks like he is about to turn inside out. Sirius is torn between rolling in laughter and concern about my outburst. The rest of the Order seems to fall somewhere in the middle.

"Maybe if you responded to your friends letters, you would be feeling more positive about the situation."

“Leave them out of this, you old bastard!” I scream.

“Harry, dear. How about a nice cup of tea?” Mrs. Weasley offers. She looks scandalized by my yelling at her hero but the mothering instincts overrode her reprimands. At least for now.

“No, thanks Mrs. Weasley. I am just going to my room. Since it seems I can’t go anywhere else.”

Looking back, it was a stupid, melodramatic teenage thing to do. Most of these people really did want to help me. (I still have no idea about Dumbledore or Snape.) But with my anger directed at my two former professors, I wasn’t willing to accept help from any adult.

Once I got back to my room I started to throw my things into my trunk. I wasn’t really thinking. I had no plan in mind. I just wanted out of that house. I shrunk my trunk into my pocket. I scribbled out a quick note to Sirius and without pausing to think, I Apparated to Diagon Alley.

I arrived just outside Gringotts and quickly made my way inside. My appearance was pure Harry Potter. No changes and my scar was right out in front. I know more than one person observed my entry into the bank.

I marched up to the closest Goblin teller and asked to make a withdrawal from my account. Without bothering to lower my voice, I asked for the maximum withdrawal permitted from my Trust account.

The Goblin looked at me with a stunned expression. I think I shocked him into an open response. “Why would you do this?”

I shrugged. “You heard what they did to my wand?” The Goblin nodded. “I am out of here. Voldemort can bugger the lot of them for all I care. I hear the Caribbean is always nice.”

The Goblin gave me a shark-like smile. “Because your Hogwarts tuition was not withdrawn this year, you have six thousand five hundred fifty-two galleons and six knuts in your trust account. You may withdrawal all of it now. It will be replenished next year from the main Potter account.”

“Can I have all of that in Pounds please? And what main Potter account?”

“The main Potter account is frozen until your eighteenth birthday or your graduation from Hogwarts, whichever comes first,” the goblin answered. “That will be 32,760 pounds. I am waiving our normal conversion fee because of the sizable balance remaining in the main Potter account.”

The Goblin handed me a small sack with the money inside. In a quieter voice, he said, “Good luck, Mr. Potter.”

“Thank you.”

I exited the bank as I heard Bill Weasley calling out from behind me. I made my way from the bank to see Mad-Eye himself stomping down the Alley. At least I think it was Mad-Eye. After my Fourth year at Hogwarts can you blame me for being suspicious?

No matter. I Apparated to the one place in London I knew well enough to attempt but would probably not have any Order members watching it; Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$.

London – 9 December 1995

I spent two weeks wandering around London. I did the tourist thing for a bit. I toured the Tower of London, Parliament and a bunch of museums. It is amazing for someone to have grown up on the outskirts of London and have seen none of it.

After two weeks though I began to wonder what I should do. I was fifteen years old. I couldn't go back to the Dursleys or the magical world. I had no identification in the Muggle world. I thought about this a lot as I wandered muggle London. I never had any plan when I left Grimmauld Place, just a major temper tantrum.

During my wanderings I ended up taking tea in a small shop. A large, older man in the uniform of a British Army sergeant took the seat next to me. At the time I appeared to be about nineteen years old. It turned out the sergeant worked in the recruiting station located just around the corner. I don't know if it was simply habit or he thought I looked

like a likely recruit, but the man soon struck up a conversation extolling the virtues of military service in general and the Army specifically.

I enjoyed the conversation as the thought appealed to the Gryffindor in me. Fighting the good fight against oppressors called out to me. Since I really had nothing better to do, I agreed to accompany the man to his office and take some information from him. Twenty minutes later, I left his office with an armful of pamphlets, booklets and little novelty items.

I wandered back to the small hotel I was staying in. Finding a place that would accept cash with no credit card or identification was not an easy job. The best thing I could say about it is it would be the last place any Death Eater, Ministry or Order lackey would think to look for me.

I spent the night reading through the materials the good sergeant provided me. The idea of the military life appealed to me. I guess part of it is the same naive thoughts any teenage boy has about life in the army. But I think part of it was it was so totally different then the world that expelled me for defending myself and my whale of a cousin. Can you understand that? I think I was running in the complete opposite direction of where I thought my life would be going.

My biggest issue was a lack of identification and records. There was no way I would be enlisted without the proper forms. Fortunately, there was a solution.

Purebloods are born and raised with no records in the Muggle world. But even they sometimes have to deal with Muggles for certain goods and services. Did you think that wizards raised all of the food or made all of the fabrics? Never ones to leave a knut unturned, the goblins offered to create a complete record trail for a fee. The more complete the trial, the greater the fee.

By ten o'clock the next morning, I was 10,000 pounds poorer but I possessed a complete set of documentation for an eighteen year old from Little Whinging that attended Stonewall High and was a recent orphan. I was darkly amused that my fictional life matched the life the Dursley's would have forced on me if not for my Hogwarts letter. The

goblins claimed that even the deepest government background check would turn up nothing suspicious. The only thing I kept of the wizard world was my new name: Cedric Diggory.

Why Cedric you ask? Cedric was a real champion who died only because he had the misfortune to get tied up in Tommy's little drama scene. He could have Apparated away at anytime, but he stayed to help me. I couldn't think of a better way to keep his memory alive then to take his name.

I did learn something interesting from the goblins. My conversation of two weeks ago in the bank had been overheard and reported in *The Daily Prophet*. In typical fashion, the paper had done another reversal and was questioning what could have made the Boy –Who-Lived, the winner of the Triwizarding Tournament, chose to leave the magical world. The transcripts of my court hearing had been published intact.

I imagine it was quite a little circus with Fudge covering his arse and Dumbledore doing whatever the hell he does to get his own way. The fact I was convicted for defending myself was not even part of the issue. I guess the wizarding world and the Dursleys have a lot in common. They both hate anyone with a different opinion then them. Also they will suck up to someone who can give them something they want and then throw them away once they get it.

I wonder which group would be more offended to hear that comparison. I am tempted to write an editorial to *The Daily Prophet* saying just that.

Bright and early I arrived at the recruiting office with all my paperwork intact and Cedric's face. I think the sergeant was behind on his quota because he almost did a back flip when I told him I wanted to ship out as soon as possible. I had to rush through a whole bank of tests and a physical but nothing too bad.

Forty-eight hours after walking into the recruiting office for the second time, I am on a transport bound for ITC (Infantry Training Centre) Catterick. As the sergeant suggested, I only packed a small bag to bring with me. At least, it was a small bag with my shrunken trunk inside.

Training – 14 December 1995 to 25 July 1996

Training was a shock to me. I think I lost my ability to feel sorry for myself the third time the drill instructor screamed in my face for falling behind on a ruck march. I always said I wanted to be treated as a normal person. Have you ever heard the saying, 'Be careful what you wish for?' The DI's did exactly that.

I grew to hate the hill behind our barracks with a passion almost as great as I had for Voldemort. The DI's thought it was great fun to march us up and down that damn hill with heavy rucks on our backs.

The first couple weeks were to see if we could hang with our mates and continue to fight if we were tired. It was hard for the first ten days and then I reached a point where I just didn't care about the pressure anymore. I started to push myself rather than have the DI's do it.

Weapons and unarmed training was brilliant. As a Seeker I always had good eye hand coordination and that paid off on the range. I led my training unit for scores on both the known distance range and the tactical range.

The final two weeks of my training were by far my favourite. I learned to "jump out of a perfectly good airplane and place my life in the hands of the angels" as the DI told us. I had not been able to spend any time flying since I out flew the dragon as part of the first task. The time in free fall was almost as good as broom flying to me. I will admit the fact I had my shrunken Firebolt in my pocket did help remove any fear I may have had. I guess the ability to cast a Cushioning Charm on any rocks you were going to land on would be a comfort as well.

You'll notice I haven't mentioned any of the other blokes in my training unit. They were good mates for the most part but as a fifteen year old, I felt out of place amongst them. I quickly gained a reputation as a shy loaner who could be depended on to carry through the mission. Mike Abbot was the leader within our unit. Good man, he pushed the rest of the platoon. He kept trying to pull me into the social world of the recruits but I was too nervous about exposing my true age or identity.

I will tell you one funny incident from my time at Catterick. The DI's decided to trash our barracks while we were out on a drill. Then they would do a surprise inspection when we returned. I think they wanted to see how we would handle the pressure.

Unfortunately, the inspection went perfectly!

The DI's could not understand how the barracks was completely cleaned up before we returned. In fact, it looked better then when we left in the morning. They searched in vain to find at least one thing to complain about but eventually gave it up as a bad job.

That night I snuck into the loo and called Dobby's name. The sock wearing elf appeared with a huge grin on his face. He was wearing mismatched castoffs of an Army uniform. He gave me a salute. "Great Harry Potter calls for Dobby?"

I allowed my form to revert for the first time in weeks to my natural state and returned his salute. "Hi, Dobby. How long have you been here?"

Dobby looked a bit sheepish. "I followed Harry Potter from Master Paddy's house. Harry Potter needs Dobby. Dobby has kept away all the owls that came looking for Harry Potter." The elf looked down at the ground. "Did Dobby do right?"

I put my hand on his shoulder and said, "You were brilliant, Dobby. Thank you. And thanks for cleaning up the barracks. It was fun seeing the DI's confused. Just be careful and don't get caught."

Dobby gave me a mischievous grin. "Oh, I won't Harry Potter, sir! Dobby having lots of fun cleaning things around the base!"

I learnt a lot about myself in training. Many of the problems I experienced in the wizarding world were of my own making. The constant pressure on me was too much. I needed to take a step back but I didn't know how. The adults around me didn't really help either. I was alternately expected to leave everything to the adults or expected to handle the pressure with an adult's maturity in what seemed a random pattern. Although I was not that much physically older, my military training helped put a lot into perspective.

Leave – 31 July 1996

After we completed our training, we were granted a two week leave before joining our unit. Since I really had nowhere to go, I decided to spend most of my time driving through the Welsh countryside. We had done some training in the area and I thought it was beautiful country. I passed near the Burrow in my travels but I resisted any temptation to stop in the area.

I celebrated my 16th birthday in a small inn near the sea. All my life living on an island and this was the first time I had ever really seen the ocean. I mean, I had seen it before but it was only the one time whilst Uncle Vernon was trying to hide from my Hogwarts letters, but it was dark and raining. I didn't get any chance to enjoy it. I posted letters to Hermione, Ron, Sirius and the others via Hermione's parents. I am sure her parents would forward them as soon as they arrived. I included pictures from the different sights I had seen in my travels.

I did sneak into the Leaky Cauldron a couple days after my birthday. I picked up a copy of the *Daily Prophet* and a couple of back issues.

It seems Voldemort and his merry band of cutthroats kept quiet until April. My scar had been giving me pain off and on all through training but I was surprised he waited so long before coming out into the open.

It seems his first act was an attack on the Ministry itself. According to the article, Voldemort stole a prophecy from the Department of Mysteries. Dumbledore and the Order of the Fried Chicken arrived to stop them. After a major fight the prophecy was dropped and everyone in the Hall, including Fudge, heard the full prophecy. So the first time I learned of the prophecy that caused the death of my parents and ruined my life was in the bloody *Prophet*. There is a little irony for you. For once their title was correct!

The Wizarding sheep went spare with the news they had hounded their "Chosen One" out of the magical world. I enjoyed the fact Fudge was unceremoniously thrown out of office. I did not enjoy that fact that every magical politician was screaming for me to be found and "put under Ministry supervision to properly see to my training so I could complete my duty to the wizarding world."

Thank Merlin I was out of Hogwarts when this news broke! Could you see what the results would have been? I mean, I am in the army and under orders, but I volunteered for that. My officers aren't expecting me to carry all the hopes and expectations of an entire society. Instead of fighting the Death Eaters, they have all of the Aurors out looking for little ol' me.

I wonder if magic isn't a negative factor in evolution. Their genetic pool is shrinking whilst the Muggles continue to grow in knowledge and numbers. As corrupt as a Muggle pol can be, they have nothing on the gits in the Ministry of Magic. It seems to me that most folks with magic lose all their common sense.

I guess sending my letters was a mistake. I'm sure it is just going to feed their little frenzy. I missed my friends and really wanted to see Sirius, but not at the cost of becoming the Wizarding worlds little mascot. I'd be treated like a mushroom again: Kept in the dark and feed shit.

I talked to Tom, the barkeep at the Cauldron. He told me everyone was on edge waiting for You-Know-Who to launch his new reign of terror. I didn't mention Voldie didn't have to really do anything as all the sheep were already terrorized.

From Tom's comments, Madam Bones was running the Ministry with Dumbledore's support. I always liked Susan and her aunt seemed to be straight, but with Dumbledore involved I would be sure to get screwed if they got their hands on me. The old git would probably want to hand me over to Snape ... for my own good of course.

I can hear the old man now. "Now Harry, Professor Snape only has your best interests at heart. You must learn to work with other people..."

Leaving the Cauldron I made a quick swing through the Alley to pick up a couple of books on magical fighting, charms, healing, transfiguration and theory. I knew that I couldn't do most of it wandlessly, but I wanted to make an attempt at expanding my magical education.

I also stopped by an apothecary for a number of potions of the healing variety. They wouldn't work for my muggle mates, but that wouldn't keep me from benefiting from them.

Exercises – 4 April 1997

I had been with my company for almost a year and I have to admit I'd loved every minute of it. I quickly gained a reputation for being a good shooter with the ability to move quietly in any situation. I admit I used Disillusionment Charms occasionally, but as the Yank Special Forces say, "If you're not cheating, you're not trying."

Because of my shooting and stealth abilities, I was placed in a scout platoon. We prided ourselves on being right sneaky bastards. I was the lowest ranker in the unit but the lieutenant, 2nd Lt. James Smallpiece, was a good bloke and skill counted more than rank within our group.

We were on a tactical exercise in Scotland when I established a reputation for myself within the battalion. We were to do a night HALO jump into the middle of Scotland. HALO stands for High Altitude, Low Opening. Basically you jump from a very high altitude and wait to the last moment before popping your chute. Not something recommended for the faint of heart. We were supposed to find a bunker guarded by an opposition force and capture its commander.

I was enjoying the drop when something caught my attention. I had just passed through a Muggle-Repelling Ward. On the ground below I could see flashes of green and red. We were further north than Hogwarts and Hogsmeade so I could only think this was a Death Eater attack on some isolated homes.

I wasn't sure what the wards effects would be on the rest of my unit dropping behind me. Best case, they were only thrown off course during the jump and ended up scattered around the Scottish Highlands. Worst case they landed disoriented in the middle of a magical fight led by a homicidal racist who hated Muggles.

Cursing my luck, I pulled the release on my chute and unhooked from my harness. The chute deploying slowed me momentarily until I was

pulled free of the harness. I took my Firebolt from my pocket and mounted my broom for the first time in two years.

It was a thrill to be really flying again but I did not have time to enjoy it. I pulled out of my dive and landed on a nearby hill overlooking the fight. Through my night vision goggles, I could see the Death Eaters moving down below. Fortunately I was assigned as the platoon's sniper for this exercise.

Regulations don't allow units to carry live ammo during an exercise. There is too much chance of an accident. However, I am a wanted man and Moody made me paranoid enough to not go anywhere without a weapon.

I quickly removed the "laser tag" unit on the end of my rifle and insert a live clip. Two minutes after landing I was prepared to eliminate some X-rays (terrorists). My platoon sergeant would be so proud!

I spotted the Death Eater who seemed to be directing an attack on the house. Six Death Eaters stood in front of the house. From the returning spells, I believed only one adult spell caster was inside.

My first shot dropped the target with none of the others noting his passing. The second was noticed but a spell fired from the house had hit his shields just prior to my shot's arrival. From their lack of reaction, they must have assumed the Stunner had penetrated the shield.

The third shot was a bit too hurried and hit too low on the target. The bullet smashed into the target's lower back. The Death Eater's agonized scream was audible even where I was positioned. That alerted the others. They realized they were down to half strength and Portkeyed out with their wounded, leaving the dead behind.

I was shocked a moment later when the front door opened and Professor McGonagall walked out with her wand in a ready position. I smiled to myself. I wonder what my old Head of House would say if she knew who just came to her rescue. The two dead Death Eaters should make a nice mystery for Dumbledore.

Picking up my gear, I quickly made my way out of the area. I didn't want to be stumbling across any Aurors or Order members

responding, late as usual. I ran for several minutes before stopping to clean my weapon and replace the laser tag device. I slipped the live clip back into a pouch.

Picking up a stick, I visualized my lieutenant's face and said, "Point Me." The stick pivoted around and pointed in the general direction of the bunker we were supposed to assault. I started making my way quickly and quietly in Lt. Smallpiece's direction.

Forty-five minutes later I came on a small clearing a bunker entrance was visible on the other side.. The rest of my unit was on their knees and surrounded by the guards. It was the damn SAS! We expected another line unit, not the premier Special Forces unit of the British Army! Tonight just kept getting better and better.

An SAS captain was questioning Lt. Smallpiece. The rest of the SAS unit stood in guard positions around the perimeter. I could not think of a single plan to rescue my unit. So, I would make this a pyrrhic victory.

I moved to a good position with good cover. I used a small plant growing charm we learnt in Herbology to fill in the cover. I scanned the surrounding area and located the SAS sniper. I guess he assumed we were all accounted for because he was watching them and not for me.

I took my shot and moved out of my position. The electronic system on the captain's gear emitted an electronic tone to indicate his "death". That alerted the SAS that I was still out here. I quickly took a second "shot" that took out the SAS sniper. A second tone screamed out as I moved out of my position and down a small ravine

I found a good hide and camouflaged myself in. I didn't use magic because I wanted to see if I was good enough without it. Two SAS troopers passed by over the next thirty minutes without sighting me.

My rig started to beep in the signal indicating the exercise was completed. I stood up from my hide and started to hump my way back to the clearing.

I came across a pair of the SAS unit waiting for me with grins on their faces.

“So you are the one who potted the old man? He is pissed right now. Gibbons is even more angry,” one announced with a grin.

“Gibbons?” I ask.

The other soldier answered, “Our team sniper. You caught him napping. He’s getting a lot of shit. He’s embarrassed.”

I grinned back. “Oops.” Chuckling we walked back to the clearing.

As we stepped into the clearing my lieutenant waved me over. He was standing with the SAS captain. “Diggory, you remember we were supposed to capture the other officer?”

I came to a respectful stance. “Sorry, sir. I figured we had no hope of completing the mission and I wanted to cause as much chaos as possible.” A ghost of a smile crossed Smallpiece’s face.

The captain still looked angry. “In a real fight your actions would have probably cost the lives of your unit, lance corporal. You should have withdrawn and reported the situation to higher. Not played a damn cowboy!”

“Yes, sir!” I acknowledged.

The senior SAS NCO wandered over and said, “Relax, captain. The lad is right about their mission outlook. You just didn’t like his choice of targets, sir.” The NCO turned to me and asked, “Why did you choose that order of targets?”

“I figured I only had one shot at the captain. I had already spotted your sniper and figured I could use a second shot on him before he spotted me.”

The older soldier laughed. “Well done. Why don’t you go down and join the rest of your unit?”

A quick glance at my lieutenant told me he agreed with that ‘suggestion’. I was more than happy to comply.

That night we joined the SAS unit in a local pub. They enjoyed telling and retelling the story of how I 'potted' their captain and sniper. Gibbons was a good bloke and offered me advice from his experiences in real world combat.

It was Gibbons who gave me an unfortunate nickname that night that stuck with me. He was over at the bar picking up a round when he called over for some help. "Hey, Potter! Get over here and give your poor target a hand, mate."

Irony hates me.

London – 1 June 1998

It was now almost three years since the wizarding world expelled me from the first real home I ever knew. It had been two and a half years since I gained a new home. Although my Cedric Diggory identity was now twenty-one years old, I was in fact just approaching my eighteenth birthday.

After my exercise with the SAS, the higher ranks started to notice me. I was sent to the Army's sniper school. My old friend Gibbons was one of the instructors. He rode my arse the whole way though. Afterwards he claimed over a pint that he couldn't show favouritism.

Gibbons was pushing for me to apply for a shot at the SAS. He was convinced I was a shoe-in. The now Lt. Smallpiece was pushing for me to put in for officer. It is nice to be wanted for my own achievements and not for the scar that now resides on my arse.

Thinking about the scar makes me think about the people I can't see anymore. Ron and Hermione should be finishing their Seventh year and preparing for their NEWTS. I smile at the thought of Hermione driving Ron spare revising for the exams. I still missed seeing them.

I've had Dobby pick me up a *Daily Prophet* or *Quibbler* on occasion. Voldemort is laying a full siege on the magical world. The Ministry finally stopped looking for me and started to fight. Not too effectively but at least showing some struggle.

The Death Eater attacks on Muggles resulted in the Prime Minister ordering units deployed in “peacekeeping” positions throughout Britain. My unit was deployed near Heathrow Airport as additional security.

I was on duty when Dobby popped in with the news from the Ministry. I told him to keep an ear out for any information. I had just come off duty three hours later when Dobby arrived with the *Daily Prophet* that announced the fall of the Ministry and Voldemort’s mandatory press conference.

I gathered my gear and set off for London. I would be off duty for the next 47 hours on a weekend pass. I checked out properly and made my way toward the closest tube station.

Aftermath – 6 June 1998

I was not too surprised when the platoon sergeant knocked on my door that morning. I had more than half expected it. “Hey Potter, the Lieutenant wants to see you in his office immediately.” He grinned, “Have you been a bad boy?” Sergeant Winston is a good NCO but he is something of a joker. He reminded me a bit of Sirius.

I reported to Lt. Smallpiece in his office. He gave me a strange look and said, “The Brigadier’s office just called. You are to report to him in twenty minutes.” I could see the question in his eyes that he wanted to ask but couldn’t.

I wanted to explain to the officer who had taught me so much what was going on, but I knew that I couldn’t. How could he believe me?

A quick shower later and I was out the door in my best uniform.

Eighteen minutes latter and I was reporting to the Brigadier himself. I admit I was more than a bit nervous. I had never seen the man really outside of formations and never spoken to him. He was a tough old soldier with a reputation for being a bull in a china shop.

“Lance Corporal Cedric Diggory reporting as ordered, sir!”

“At ease, Lance Corporal” he said after returning my salute. “Lance corporal, these people came out here from the Prime Minister’s office to speak with you.” He gestured at the two additional people in the room whose presence I had ignored. “This is Mr. Shackbolt of the Minister’s staff and Chief Inspector Lupin. They will not tell me why they wish to speak with you. Only that it is a matter of national security. Can you tell me what they are here for, corporal?”

“Yes sir, I can.”

He waited a minute for me to continue. Then he smiled. “You can keep your mouth shut, good. You can use Colonel Grimes office down the hall for your discussion. Dismissed, corporal.”

I saluted again. “Yes, sir!”

I led the silent witch and wizard down the hall. Neither spoke a word until we were in the room and the door was closed.

“What do you want Kingsley?” I asked.

“Harry, is it really you?”

Tonks wasn’t so restrained. “Harry!” She launched herself across the space separating us to wrap her arms around my neck.

I allowed my form to revert to my natural state. “Hey Tonks. How you doing?”

The Auror eased off enough to smack my shoulder. “You disappear for almost three years and all I get is a ‘how are you doing’?”

I shrugged. “Staying in that house was killing me. Since I was useless to everyone anyway, leaving made sense to me. So, how is married life to Remus treating you?”

I was surprised when she ignored the fact I knew of her marriage. When Tonks latches on, she will not let go. “You almost killed Sirius with worry. At least dropping us a post every so often would have helped.”

I glanced at Kingsley. "I couldn't take the chance of Dumbledore or Voldemort tracking me down. I sent letters when I could."

I got hit again. "I am fine' does not count as a letter!"

"Enough Tonks. Again, what do you want Kingsley?"

The large, black Auror seemed a bit stunned by my cold tone. "You killed Voldemort, Harry and you took out most of his remaining inner circle. What did you expect us to do? People want to thank you."

"Like by leaving me alone, maybe? You people expelled me remember? I killed Tommy for my parents and Cedric, not the wizarding world."

"Harry, that expulsion was reversed three weeks after you left us!"

"Only because the word got out why I left," I growled. "Nothing would have changed if I went back"

"Harry, take this." Tonks held something out. My legs suddenly felt like I'd done a 10km ruck run. It was my wand. "Dumbledore switched wands in the courtroom. He gave them a WWW fake."

I took the wand and dropped stunned into a nearby chair. "So he let me suffer knowing he had my wand the whole time?"

"He was afraid Harry that Voldemort could use your scar to possess you. If you knew about the wand then he would too. Can't you understand that?"

"Possess me? My scar never even gave me another vision again after I left the wizarding world. It twinged now and again but that was all. Snake-face was always a pain the arse."

The pair of Aurors looked stunned again. Either it was my rubbish joke or I was missing something again.

After a moment, Tonks tried again. "Harry, would you please come back with us? Minister Bones and Dumbledore want to speak with

you. Your friends want to see you. Sirius and Remus are dying to see you. Please come with us.”

Shacklebolt cleared his throat. “The Prime Minister would like to see you first. We had to use his office to track you down.”

I sighed. “I will go to see the Prime Minister. After that we will just have to see.”

I finished telling my story to the man sitting across from me. He let me tell the story my way and never interrupted me. There was a moment of silence after I finished then he looked up.

“Are you going to go back and see your friends?” the Prime Minister asked.

“I don’t know, sir. I have a lot of issues with them.”

“It is only my advice but you have to get closure before you can really move on.” He took a sip of his now cold tea. “Do you know what you plan for the future? I understand you have done well in the army.”

I answered honestly. “I had planned on staying in, but I don’t know now.”

He nodded in understanding. “Take some time. Get your affairs in order and then come see me. If you want to stay in as a corporal, I can accept that. But I can find a better use of your talents. I’ve never felt comfortable with the vague connection between our two worlds. I could use someone to act as my representative, an ambassador if you will.”

It didn’t sound like something I would be interested in. I liked life in the military. Did I really want to give it up? “I’ll think about it, sir.” I answered. I was not ready to give the PM a flat ‘no’.

The Prime Minister rose out of his seat and extended his hand. I rose and took it. “Thank you, Mr. Potter for your services to the Realm. All of Britain is in your debt this morning. Those terrorists cost us far too many lives.”

I took my leave of the Prime Minister and walked out of his office. Tonks and Kingsley were waiting for me in the outer office.

Hogwarts

The school hadn't changed much since I'd last seen it. Hogsmeade looked a bit broken around the edges. I guess the Death Eaters attacked it a time or two.

We appeared via Portkey just outside the Hogwart's gates. My nerves were up but I was containing them. (Having a DI scream in your face is a great way to learn to keep your emotions off your face.) We marched up the path. Tonks and Kingsley in their Auror robes and me in my uniform. The only thing I changed was my nametag to read Potter instead of Diggory.

It was just inside the main doors when I was assaulted by a pair of runaway female missiles; one with brown, curly hair and one with red. "Harry!!"

Only the mass from almost three years of military training allowed me to stay on me feet. Something inside of me gave as my two female friends hugged me.

Of course, it could also have been the natural effect of having two very attractive young witches groping all over me too.

"Harry we missed you! Sending letters saying, 'I'm fine' are not sufficient!" Hermione told me even as she held on.

"So I've heard," I chuckled as I hugged her back.

"Hey, mate. That is my sister and my fiancé you have your hands all over."

I looked up to see Ron standing a few feet away. He was still taller than I am but still as lean as ever. The girls released me long enough for me to shake Ron's hand. Then they were back on my like limpet mines. Apparently they were not taking any chances of me making a repeat escape.

They walked me into the Great Hall where a large black dog joined us. Padfoot put his paws on my shoulders and started licking my face. With the girls clinging to my arms, I couldn't do anything to protect myself.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter," I heard a familiar voice say. Padfoot and the girls backed off to allow me to face Dumbledore.

"Dumbledore," I simply greeted him.

He gave me that same damn grandfatherly smile with the eye twinkle. "It is good to finally have you back at Hogwarts, Harry."

In a quiet, flat voice, I told him, "I am not back at Hogwarts. I am here to see my friends and because the Prime Minister 'advised' me to do so. I am most definitely not 'back'. I am not concerned with your justifications for your actions. It doesn't matter anymore. You kept things from me that I needed to know. I had to learn about the prophecy from an article in the *Daily Prophet*. Your little game with my wand was just the final straw." I turned back to my friends and guided them away from the old wizard.

Dumbledore looked a bit surprised. I am sure he expected either an angry, yelling Harry Potter or one who forgave him for everything. A dismissive one was unexpected.

I realized something as I walked away from Dumbledore surrounded by my old friends. I was my own man. And for the first time in my life, I felt at peace with myself.

A/N: I hope you enjoyed the story. I tried to make the military background and information as accurate as possible but as I am not a veteran of the British Army I cannot promise it. My apologies for any inaccuracies to any soldiers in the audience.

Enjoy this Omake I wrote at the last minute.

Epilogue

Two weeks after my 'return' to the wizarding world, I was walking towards the Three Broomsticks with Ron, Hermione, Ginny. We were

to meet up with a number of former classmates. I definitely stood out in my camouflaged utilities uniform amongst all the robed witches and wizards in the village. I am a soldier and proud of it. Let them think what they like.

I spotted an unusual sight coming down towards us. It looked like a magically propelled wheelchair. "What happened to him? I saw him standing at Voldemort's little party." I ask curiously.

Hermione followed my gaze and said, "He had a broom accident last April. He was at home on a Hogsmeade weekend when his broom died in mid-flight. He came down on a fence post that shattered his spine. Even magic couldn't restore his ability to walk. He was probably being held up magically when you saw him."

Ron scoffed. "The Malfoys are suing the Firebolt Company. Malfoy has been bragging that he will end up owning the company before he is done."

"Oh look, Scarhead the expelled returns and with all his little band of followers trailing him like puppies. And look, he is even dressed as a Muggle."

"Why aren't you in Azkaban, Malfoy?"

The little ferret took on an innocent look. "I didn't want to be there, Madam Minister, but my father insisted. Look at me, I was in no position to resist him." Draco sneered at me, "I didn't even need to spend any of my money."

Hermione frowned, "He wasn't marked so the Ministry had to let him go."

"Yes Potter, even in these fallen times the Malfoy name has influence."

I put a couple things together quickly in my head. I leaned in towards Malfoy a bit. "Tell me, was the attack on McGonagall's house supposed to be your initiation? Was your failure there the reason Tom wouldn't mark you?"

The sudden paleness on Draco's face was all the confirmation I needed.

I leant in a bit more and dropped my voice into a deadly serious whisper. "Don't worry, Malfoy. Next time I won't be rushed and I'll aim a bit higher." I winked.

Malfoy's chair suddenly rolled back a bit as he stared up at me in shock. I could see fear in his eyes as well. The last scion of the Malfoy family turned his chair and rolled away.

"And Draco," I called after him. The chair paused. "I will be visiting Firebolt's legal counsel by the end of the week with my story. At least unless the case is dropped."

Draco continued on his way without looking back.

I turned and looked at my friends. They all looked shocked at what they had just heard.

Ron grinned. "That was brilliant! Don't take this the wrong way mate. You're scary. Brilliant, but scary."

I grinned back. "Ron, you need a new line. You said that about Hermione in our First year."

He nodded. "And it's still true." He didn't duck in time as the witch in question smacked the back of his head.

We laughed and continued our way to the Three Broomsticks.